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SCHAKOWSKY SPEARHEADS FEDERAL EFFORT TO INCREASE NUMBER OF HOMES ACCESSIBLE TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

CHICAGO, IL - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today announced plans to introduce federal Visitability legislation to greatly increase the number of homes accessible to people with disabilities. The legislation would require all newly-built single family homes receiving federal funds to meet three specific accessibility standards: an accessible route, or "zero step," into the home, 32" clearance doorways on the main level, and one accessible bathroom.

"It defies logic to build new homes that block people out when it's so easy and cheap to build new homes that let people in. The Visitability concept is gaining momentum around the country. States like Kansas, Texas and Vermont along with a number of local communities have passed laws that require homebuilders to meet Visitability requirements. A federal law will build on the momentum that has already been created," said Schakowsky, who is a member of the Housing and Community Opportunity Subcommittee.

The proposed legislation is based on the concept of Visitability, an affordable, sustainable and inclusive design approach for integrating basic accessibility features into all newly-built homes and housing. While serving as a member of the Illinois State House, Schakowsky introduced similar legislation.

"When homes are accessible, it benefits not only today's disability community, but also all of us who are friends and family members of people with disabilities. Often, the prohibitive cost of making an existing home accessible deprives seniors of their independence and pushes them into nursing homes. By making new homes accessible, we guarantee that many seniors can age at home," Schakowsky said.

"Homes that meet visitability standards are essential for people with disabilities, sensible because 3 out of 10 people will face a disability before they are 67, and practical if you want to invite a friend or a family member over for dinner who is disabled," Schakowsky added.

Schakowsky, who joined disability rights leaders to announce her proposal during a news conference organized by Access Living of Metropolitan Chicago and DRACH, the Disability Rights Action Coalition for Housing, concluded, "I am proud to join with my friends at Access Living and other tireless advocates as we begin our campaign for national Visitability standards."